

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
18 September 2003 (18.09.2003)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 03/076637 A1

- (51) International Patent Classification⁷: C12P 13/04, 13/08, C12N 1/21, 15/11, 15/57
- (21) International Application Number: PCT/EP03/01998
- (22) International Filing Date: 27 February 2003 (27.02.2003)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
102 10 965.6 13 March 2002 (13.03.2002) DE
60/365,838 21 March 2002 (21.03.2002) US
- (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): DE-GUSSA AG [DE/DE]; Bennigsenplatz 1, 40474 Düsseldorf (DE).
- (72) Inventors; and
- (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): RIEPING, Mechthild [DE/DE]; Mönkebergstrasse 1, 33619 Bielefeld (DE). HERMANN, Thomas [DE/DE]; Zirkonstrasse 8, 33739 Bielefeld (DE).
- (74) Common Representative: DEGUSSA AG; Intellectual Property Management, Patente und Marken, Standort Hanau, Postfach 13 45, 63403 Hanau (DE).
- (81) Designated States (national): BR, CN, KR, MX, PL, US.
- (84) Designated States (regional): European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, TR).
- Declarations under Rule 4.17:**
- as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii)) for the following designations BR, CN, KR, MX, PL, European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, TR)
 - of inventorship (Rule 4.17(iv)) for US only
- Published:**
- with international search report
 - before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments
- For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: PROCESS FOR THE PREPARATION OF L-AMINO ACIDS USING STRAINS OF THE FAMILY ENTEROBACTERIACEAE

(57) Abstract: The invention relates to a process for the preparation of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, in which the following steps are carried out: a) fermentation of microorganisms of the family Enterobacteriaceae which produce the desired L-amino acid and in which the pepB gene, or nucleotide sequences coding therefor, is (are) enhanced and, in particular, overexpressed, b) enrichment of the desired L-amino acid in the medium or in the cells of the bacteria, and c) isolation of the desired L-amino acid.



WO 03/076637 A1

**Process for the Preparation of L-Amino Acids using
Strains of the Family Enterobacteriaceae**

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a process for the
5 preparation of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, using
strains of the family Enterobacteriaceae in which the pepB
gene is enhanced.

State of the Art

L-Amino acids, especially L-threonine, are used in human
10 medicine and in the pharmaceutical industry, in the food
industry and very particularly in animal nutrition.

It is known to prepare L-amino acids by the fermentation of
strains of Enterobacteriaceae, especially *Escherichia coli*
(*E. coli*) and *Serratia marcescens*. Because of their great
15 importance, attempts are constantly being made to improve
the preparative processes. Improvements to the processes
may relate to measures involving the fermentation
technology, e.g. stirring and oxygen supply, or the
composition of the nutrient media, e.g. the sugar concen-
20 tration during fermentation, or the work-up to the product
form, e.g. by ion exchange chromatography, or the intrinsic
productivity characteristics of the microorganism itself.

The productivity characteristics of these microorganisms
are improved by using methods of mutagenesis, selection and
25 mutant choice to give strains which are resistant to
antimetabolites, e.g. the threonine analog α -amino- β -
hydroxyvaleric acid (AHV), or auxotrophic for metabolites
of regulatory significance, and produce L-amino acids, e.g.
L-threonine.

30 Methods of recombinant DNA technology have also been used
for some years to improve L-amino acid-producing strains of
the family Enterobacteriaceae by amplifying individual

amino acid biosynthesis genes and studying the effect on production.

Object of the Invention

The object which the inventors set themselves was to
5 provide novel procedures for improving the preparation of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine.

Summary of the Invention

The invention provides a process for the preparation of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, using microorganisms
10 of the family Enterobacteriaceae which, in particular, already produce L-amino acids and in which the nucleotide sequence coding for the pepB gene is enhanced.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The term "L-amino acids" or "amino acids" mentioned
15 hereafter is to be understood as meaning one or more amino acids, including their salts, selected from the group comprising L-asparagine, L-threonine, L-serine, L-glutamate, L-glycine, L-alanine, L-cysteine, L-valine, L-methionine, L-isoleucine, L-leucine, L-tyrosine, L-
20 phenylalanine, L-histidine, L-lysine, L-tryptophan and L-arginine. L-Threonine is particularly preferred.

In this context the term "enhancement" describes the increase, in a microorganism, of the intracellular activity of one or more enzymes or proteins coded for by the
25 appropriate DNA, for example by increasing the copy number of the gene or genes, using a strong promoter or a gene or allele coding for an appropriate enzyme or protein with a high activity, and optionally combining these measures.

Through the measures of enhancement, especially over-
30 expression, the activity or concentration of the appropriate protein is generally increased at least by 10%,

25%, 50%, 75%, 100%, 150%, 200%, 300%, 400% or 500%, and at most by up to 1000% or 2000%, based on that of the wild-type protein or the activity or concentration of the protein in the starting microorganism.

5 The process is characterized in that the following steps are carried out:

- a) fermentation of microorganisms of the family Enterobacteriaceae which produce the desired L-amino acid and in which the pepB gene, or nucleotide sequences
10 coding therefor, is (are) enhanced and, in particular, overexpressed,
- b) enrichment of the desired L-amino acid in the medium or in the cells of the microorganisms, and
- c) isolation of the desired L-amino acid, where
15 constituents of the fermentation broth, and/or all or part (≥ 0 to 100%) of the biomass, optionally remain in the product.

The microorganisms provided by the present invention can produce L-amino acids from glucose, sucrose, lactose,
20 fructose, maltose, molasses, optionally starch or optionally cellulose, or from glycerol and ethanol. Said microorganisms are representatives of the family Enterobacteriaceae selected from the genera Escherichia, Erwinia, Providencia and Serratia. The genera Escherichia
25 and Serratia are preferred. The species Escherichia coli and Serratia marcescens may be mentioned in particular among the genera Escherichia and Serratia respectively.

Examples of suitable strains, particularly L-threonine-producing strains, of the genus Escherichia, and especially
30 of the species Escherichia coli, are:

Escherichia coli TF427

Escherichia coli H4578

- Escherichia coli KY10935
Escherichia coli VNIIGenetika MG442
Escherichia coli VNIIGenetika M1
Escherichia coli VNIIGenetika 472T23
5 Escherichia coli BKIIM B-3996
Escherichia coli kat 13
Escherichia coli KCCM-10132

Examples of suitable L-threonine-producing strains of the
genus Serratia, and especially of the species Serratia
10 marcescens, are:

- Serratia marcescens HNr21
Serratia marcescens TLr156
Serratia marcescens T2000.

- L-Threonine-producing strains of the family
15 Enterobacteriaceae preferably possess, inter alia, one or
more genetic or phenotypic characteristics selected from
the group comprising resistance to α -amino- β -hydroxyvaleric
acid, resistance to thialysine, resistance to ethionine,
resistance to α -methylserine, resistance to diaminosuccinic
20 acid, resistance to α -aminobutyric acid, resistance to
borrelidine, resistance to rifampicin, resistance to valine
analogs such as valine hydroxamate, resistance to purine
analogs such as 6-dimethylaminopurine, need for L-
methionine, optionally partial and compensable need for L-
25 isoleucine, need for meso-diaminopimelic acid, auxotrophy
in respect of threonine-containing dipeptides, resistance
to L-threonine, resistance to L-homoserine, resistance to
L-lysine, resistance to L-methionine, resistance to L-
glutamic acid, resistance to L-aspartate, resistance to L-
30 leucine, resistance to L-phenylalanine, resistance to L-
serine, resistance to L-cysteine, resistance to L-valine,
sensitivity to fluoropyruvate, defective threonine
dehydrogenase, optionally capability for sucrose
utilization, enhancement of the threonine operon,
35 enhancement of homoserine dehydrogenase I-aspartate kinase

I, preferably of the feedback-resistant form, enhancement of homoserine kinase, enhancement of threonine synthase, enhancement of aspartate kinase, optionally of the feedback-resistant form, enhancement of aspartate
5 semialdehyde dehydrogenase, enhancement of phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase, optionally of the feedback-resistant form, enhancement of phosphoenolpyruvate synthase, enhancement of transhydrogenase, enhancement of the RhtB gene product, enhancement of the RhtC gene
10 product, enhancement of the YfiK gene product, enhancement of a pyruvate carboxylase and attenuation of acetic acid formation.

It has been found that the production of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, by microorganisms of the family
15 Enterobacteriaceae is improved after enhancement and, in particular, over-expression of the pepB gene.

The nucleotide sequences of the genes of Escherichia coli belong to the state of the art (cf. literature references below) and can also be taken from the genome sequence of
20 Escherichia coli published by Blattner et al. (Science 277, 1453-1462 (1997)).

The pepB gene is described inter alia by the following data:

Name: aminopeptidase B, cysteinylglycinase
25 Reference: Suzuki et al.; Journal of Fermentation and Bioengineering 82, 392-397 (1996)
Suzuki et al.; Bioscience, Biotechnology and Biochemistry 65(7), 1549-1558 (2001)
Accession no.: AE000339

30 The nucleic acid sequences can be taken from the data banks of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) of the National Library of Medicine (Bethesda, MD, USA), the nucleotide sequence data bank of the European Molecular

Biologies Laboratories (EMBL, Heidelberg, Germany, or Cambridge, UK) or the DNA Databank of Japan (DDBJ, Mishima, Japan).

The genes described in the literature references cited can
5 be used according to the invention. It is also possible to use alleles of the genes which result from the degeneracy of the genetic code or from neutral sense mutations. The use of endogenous genes is preferred.

The term "endogenous genes" or "endogenous nucleotide
10 sequences" is to be understood as meaning the genes or alleles, or nucleotide sequences, present in the population of a species.

Enhancement can be achieved for example by increasing the expression of the genes or enhancing the catalytic
15 properties of the proteins. Both measures may optionally be combined.

The peptidase and cysteinylglycinase activity of aminopeptidase B, which is coded for by the polynucleotide pepB, can be determined by the method described by Suzuki
20 et al. (Journal of Bacteriology 183(4), 1489-1490 (2001)).

Over-expression can be achieved by increasing the copy number of the appropriate genes or mutating the promoter and regulatory region or the ribosome binding site located upstream from the structural gene. Expression cassettes
25 incorporated upstream from the structural gene work in the same way. Inducible promoters additionally make it possible to increase expression in the course of L-threonine production by fermentation. Measures for prolonging the life of the mRNA also improve expression.
30 Furthermore, the enzyme activity is also enhanced by preventing the degradation of the enzyme protein. The genes or gene constructs can either be located in plasmids of variable copy number or be integrated and amplified in

the chromosome. Alternatively, it is also possible to achieve over-expression of the genes in question by changing the composition of the media and the culture technique.

- 5 Those skilled in the art will find relevant instructions inter alia in Chang and Cohen (Journal of Bacteriology 134, 1141-1156 (1978)), Hartley and Gregori (Gene 13, 347-353 (1981)), Amann and Brosius (Gene 40, 183-190 (1985)), de Broer et al. (Proceedings of the National Academy of
10 Sciences of the United States of America 80, 21-25 (1983)), LaVallie et al. (BIO/TECHNOLOGY 11, 187-193 (1993)), PCT/US97/13359, Llosa et al. (Plasmid 26, 222-224 (1991)), Quandt and Klipp (Gene 80, 161-169 (1989)), Hamilton et al. (Journal of Bacteriology 171, 4617-4622 (1989)), Jensen and
15 Hammer (Biotechnology and Bioengineering 58, 191-195 (1998)) and well-known textbooks on genetics and molecular biology.

- Plasmid vectors replicable in Enterobacteriaceae, e.g. cloning vectors derived from pACYC184 (Bartolomé et al.;
20 Gene 102, 75-78 (1991)), pTrc99A (Amann et al.; Gene 69, 301-315 (1988)) or pSC101 derivatives (Vocke and Bastia; Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA 80(21), 6557-6561 (1983)), can be used. In one process according to the invention, it is possible to use a strain
25 transformed with a plasmid vector, said plasmid vector carrying at least one nucleotide sequence coding for the pepB gene.

- Also, mutations which affect the expression of the appropriate genes can be transferred to different strains
30 by sequence exchange (Hamilton et al.; Journal of Bacteriology 171, 4617-4622 (1989)), conjugation or transduction.

Furthermore, for the production of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, with strains of the family

Enterobacteriaceae, it can be advantageous not only to enhance the pepB gene but also to enhance one or more enzymes of the known threonine biosynthetic pathway, or enzymes of the anaplerotic metabolism, or enzymes for the
5 production of reduced nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate, or glycolytic enzymes, or PTS enzymes or enzymes of sulfur metabolism. The use of endogenous genes is generally preferred.

Thus, for example, one or more genes selected from the
10 group comprising:

- the thrABC operon coding for aspartate kinase, homoserine dehydrogenase, homoserine kinase and threonine synthase (US-A-4,278,765),
- the pyc gene coding for pyruvate carboxylase (DE-A-19 831
15 609),
- the pps gene coding for phosphoenolpyruvate synthase (Molecular and General Genetics 231(2), 332-336 (1992)),
- the ppc gene coding for phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase (Gene 31, 279-283 (1984)),
- 20 • the pntA and pntB genes coding for transhydrogenase (European Journal of Biochemistry 158, 647-653 (1986)),
- the rhtB gene for homoserine resistance (EP-A-0 994 190),
- the mqo gene coding for malate:quinone oxidoreductase (DE 100 348 33.5),
- 25 • the rhtC gene for threonine resistance (EP-A-1 013 765),
- the thrE gene of Corynebacterium glutamicum coding for threonine export protein (DE 100 264 94.8),

- the *gdhA* gene coding for glutamate dehydrogenase (Nucleic Acids Research 11, 5257-5266 (1983); Gene 23, 199-209 (1983)),
- the *hns* gene coding for DNA binding protein HLP-II
5 (Molecular and General Genetics 212, 199-202 (1988)),
- the *pgm* gene coding for phosphoglucomutase (Journal of Bacteriology 176, 5847-5851 (1994)),
- the *fba* gene coding for fructose biphosphate aldolase (Biochemical Journal 257, 529-534 (1989)),
- 10 • the *ptsH* gene of the *ptsHIcrr* operon coding for phosphohistidine protein hexose phosphotransferase of the phosphotransferase system PTS (Journal of Biological Chemistry 262, 16241-16253 (1987)),
- the *ptsI* gene of the *ptsHIcrr* operon coding for enzyme I
15 of the phosphotransferase system PTS (Journal of Biological Chemistry 262, 16241-16253 (1987)),
- the *crr* gene of the *ptsHIcrr* operon coding for the glucose-specific IIA component of the phosphotransferase system PTS (Journal of Biological Chemistry 262, 16241-
20 16253 (1987)),
- the *ptsG* gene coding for the glucose-specific IIBC component (Journal of Biological Chemistry 261, 16398-16403 (1986)),
- the *lrp* gene coding for the regulator of the leucine
25 regulon (Journal of Biological Chemistry 266, 10768-10774 (1991)),
- the *csrA* gene coding for the global regulator Csr (Journal of Bacteriology 175, 4744-4755 (1993)),
- the *fadR* gene coding for the regulator of the *fad* regulon
30 (Nucleic Acids Research 16, 7995-8009 (1988)),

- the iclR gene coding for the regulator of the central intermediary metabolism (Journal of Bacteriology 172, 2642-2649 (1990)),
- 5 • the mopB gene coding for the 10 kd chaperone (Journal of Biological Chemistry 261, 12414-12419 (1986)), which is also known as groES,
- 10 • the ahpC gene of the ahpCF operon coding for the small subunit of alkyl hydroperoxide reductase (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA 92, 7617-7621 (1995)),
- the ahpF gene of the ahpCF operon coding for the large subunit of alkyl hydroperoxide reductase (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA 92, 7617-7621 (1995)),
- 15 • the cysK gene coding for cysteine synthase A (Journal of Bacteriology 170, 3150-3157 (1988)),
- the cysB gene coding for the regulator of the cys regulon (Journal of Biological Chemistry 262, 5999-6005 (1987)),
- 20 • the cysJ gene of the cysJIH operon coding for the flavoprotein of NADPH sulfite reductase (Journal of Biological Chemistry 264, 15796-15808 (1989), Journal of Biological Chemistry 264, 15726-15737 (1989)),
- the cysI gene of the cysJIH operon coding for the hemoprotein of NADPH sulfite reductase (Journal of
25 Biological Chemistry 264, 15796-15808 (1989), Journal of Biological Chemistry 264, 15726-15737 (1989)),
- the cysH gene of the cysJIH operon coding for adenylyl sulfate reductase (Journal of Biological Chemistry 264, 15796-15808 (1989), Journal of Biological Chemistry 264,
30 15726-15737 (1989)),

- the *phoB* gene of the *phoBR* operon coding for the PhoB positive regulator of the *pho* regulon (Journal of Molecular Biology 190 (1), 37-44 (1986)),
- the *phoR* gene of the *phoBR* operon coding for the sensor
5 protein of the *pho* regulon (Journal of Molecular Biology 192 (3), 549-556 (1986)),
- the *phoE* gene coding for protein E of the outer cell membrane (Journal of Molecular Biology 163 (4), 513-532 (1983)),
- 10 • the *pykF* gene coding for fructose-stimulated pyruvate kinase I (Journal of Bacteriology 177 (19), 5719-5722 (1995)),
- the *pfkB* gene coding for 6-phosphofructokinase II (Gene 28 (3), 337-342 (1984)),
- 15 • the *malE* gene coding for the periplasmatic binding protein of maltose transport (Journal of Biological Chemistry 259 (16), 10606-10613 (1984)),
- the *rseA* gene of the *rseABC* operon coding for a membrane protein with anti-sigmaE activity (Molecular Microbiology
20 24 (2), 355-371 (1997)),
- the *rseC* gene of the *rseABC* operon coding for a global regulator of the sigmaE factor (Molecular Microbiology 24 (2), 355-371 (1997)),
- the *sodA* gene coding for superoxide dismutase (Journal of
25 Bacteriology 155 (3), 1078-1087 (1983)),
- the *sucA* gene of the *sucABCD* operon coding for the decarboxylase subunit of 2-ketoglutarate dehydrogenase (European Journal of Biochemistry 141 (2), 351-359 (1984)),

- the sucB gene of the sucABCD operon coding for the dihydrolipoyl transsuccinase E2 subunit of 2-ketoglutarate dehydrogenase (European Journal of Biochemistry 141 (2), 361-374 (1984)),
- 5 • the sucC gene of the sucABCD operon coding for the β subunit of succinyl-CoA synthetase (Biochemistry 24 (22), 6245-6252 (1985)), and
- the sucD gene of the sucABCD operon coding for the α subunit of succinyl-CoA synthetase (Biochemistry 24 (22),
10 6245-6252 (1985))

can be simultaneously enhanced and, in particular, overexpressed.

Furthermore, for the production of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, it can be advantageous not only to
15 enhance the pepB gene but also to attenuate and, in particular, switch off one or more genes selected from the group comprising:

- the tdh gene coding for threonine dehydrogenase (Journal of Bacteriology 169, 4716-4721 (1987)),
- 20 • the mdh gene coding for malate dehydrogenase (E.C. 1.1.1.37) (Archives in Microbiology 149, 36-42 (1987)),
- the gene product of the open reading frame (orf) yjfa (Accession Number AAC77180 of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI, Bethesda, MD, USA)),
- 25 • the gene product of the open reading frame (orf) ytfP (Accession Number AAC77179 of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI, Bethesda, MD, USA)),
- the pckA gene coding for the enzyme phosphoenolpyruvate carboxykinase (Journal of Bacteriology 172, 7151-7156
30 (1990)),

- the poxB gene coding for pyruvate oxidase (Nucleic Acids Research 14 (13), 5449-5460 (1986)),
- the aceA gene coding for the enzyme isocitrate lyase (Journal of Bacteriology 170, 4528-4536 (1988)),
- 5 • the dgsA gene coding for the DgsA regulator of the phosphotransferase system (Bioscience, Biotechnology and Biochemistry 59, 256-261 1995)), which is also known as the mlc gene,
- the fruR gene coding for the fructose repressor
10 (Molecular and General Genetics 226, 332-336 (1991)), which is also known as the cra gene,
- the rpoS gene coding for the sigma³⁸ factor (WO 01/05939), which is also known as the katF gene,
- the aspA gene coding for aspartate ammonium lyase
15 (aspartase) (Nucleic Acids Research 13 (6), 2063-2074 (1985)), and
- the aceB gene coding for malate synthase A (Nucleic Acids Research 16 (19), 9342 (1988)),

or reduce the expression.

- 20 In this context the term "attenuation" describes the decrease or switching-off of the intracellular activity, in a microorganism, of one or more enzymes (proteins) coded for by the appropriate DNA, for example by using a weak promoter or using a gene or allele which codes for an
25 appropriate enzyme with a low activity or inactivates the appropriate enzyme (protein) or gene, and optionally combining these measures.

The attenuation measures generally reduce the activity or concentration of the appropriate protein to 0 to 75%, 0 to
30 50%, 0 to 25%, 0 to 10% or 0 to 5% of the activity or concentration of the wild-type protein or of the activity

or concentration of the protein in the starting microorganism.

Furthermore, for the production of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, it can be advantageous not only to enhance the pepB gene but also to switch off unwanted secondary reactions (Nakayama: "Breeding of Amino Acid Producing Microorganisms", in: Overproduction of Microbial Products, Krumphanzl, Sikyta, Vanek (eds.), Academic Press, London, UK, 1982).

- 10 The microorganisms prepared according to the invention can be cultivated by the batch process, the fed batch process or the repeated fed batch process. A summary of known cultivation methods is provided in the textbook by Chmiel (Bioprozesstechnik 1. Einführung in die
- 15 Bioverfahrenstechnik (Bioprocess Technology 1. Introduction to Bioengineering) (Gustav Fischer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1991)) or in the textbook by Storhas (Bioreaktoren und periphere Einrichtungen (Bioreactors and Peripheral Equipment) (Vieweg Verlag, Brunswick/Wiesbaden, 1994)).
- 20 The culture medium to be used must appropriately meet the demands of the particular strains. Descriptions of culture media for various microorganisms can be found in "Manual of Methods for General Bacteriology" of the American Society for Bacteriology (Washington DC, USA, 1981).
- 25 Carbon sources which can be used are sugars and carbohydrates, e.g. glucose, sucrose, lactose, fructose, maltose, molasses, starch and optionally cellulose, oils and fats, e.g. soya oil, sunflower oil, groundnut oil and coconut fat, fatty acids, e.g. palmitic acid, stearic acid
- 30 and linoleic acid, alcohols; e.g. glycerol and ethanol, and organic acids, e.g. acetic acid. These substances can be used individually or as a mixture.

Nitrogen sources which can be used are organic nitrogen-containing compounds such as peptones, yeast extract, meat extract, malt extract, corn steep liquor, soya flour and urea, or inorganic compounds such as ammonium sulfate, ammonium chloride, ammonium phosphate, ammonium carbonate and ammonium nitrate. The nitrogen sources can be used individually or as a mixture.

Phosphorus sources which can be used are phosphoric acid, potassium dihydrogenphosphate or dipotassium hydrogenphosphate or the corresponding sodium salts. The culture medium must also contain metal salts, e.g. magnesium sulfate or iron sulfate, which are necessary for growth. Finally, essential growth-promoting substances such as amino acids and vitamins can be used in addition to the substances mentioned above. Suitable precursors can also be added to the culture medium. Said feed materials can be added to the culture all at once or fed in appropriately during cultivation.

The fermentation is generally carried out at a pH of 5.5 to 9.0, especially of 6.0 to 8.0. The pH of the culture is controlled by the appropriate use of basic compounds such as sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide, ammonia or aqueous ammonia, or acid compounds such as phosphoric acid or sulfuric acid. Foaming can be controlled using antifoams such as fatty acid polyglycol esters. The stability of plasmids can be maintained by adding suitable selectively acting substances, e.g. antibiotics, to the medium. Aerobic conditions are maintained by introducing oxygen or oxygen-containing gaseous mixtures, e.g. air, into the culture. The temperature of the culture is normally 25°C to 45°C and preferably 30°C to 40°C. The culture is continued until the formation of L-amino acids or L-threonine has reached a maximum. This objective is normally achieved within 10 hours to 160 hours.

L-Amino acids can be analyzed by means of anion exchange chromatography followed by ninhydrin derivation, as described by Spackman et al. (Analytical Chemistry 30, 1190-1206 (1958)), or by reversed phase HPLC, as described
5 by Lindroth et al. (Analytical Chemistry 51, 1167-1174 (1979)).

The process according to the invention is used for the preparation of L-amino acids, e.g. L-threonine, L-isoleucine, L-valine, L-methionine, L-homoserine and L-
10 lysine, especially L-threonine, by fermentation.

The incubation temperature in the preparation of strains and transformants is 37°C.

Example 1

Construction of expression plasmid pTrc99ApepB

15 The pepB gene from E. coli K12 is amplified using the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and synthetic oligonucleotides. The nucleotide sequence of the pepB gene in E. coli K12 MG1655 (Accession Number AE000339, Blattner et al. (Science 277, 1453-1474 (1997))) is used as the
20 starting material to synthesize PCR primers (MWG Biotech, Ebersberg, Germany). The 5' ends of the primers are extended with recognition sequences for restriction enzymes and with two to four additional bases. The recognition sequences for BamHI and SalI, which are underlined in the
25 nucleotide sequence shown below, are chosen for the pepB5' and pepB3' primers respectively:

pepB5': 5'-CGCGGATCC-AACTGGCGGCCCTTT-3' (SEQ ID No. 1)

pepB3': 5'-ACGCGTCGAC-CTGATGCGCTACGCT-3' (SEQ ID No. 2)

The chromosomal E. coli K12 MG1655 DNA used for the PCR is
30 isolated with "Qiagen Genomic-tips 100/G" (QIAGEN, Hilden, Germany) in accordance with the manufacturer's

- instructions. An approx. 1440 bp DNA fragment can be amplified with the specific primers under standard PCR conditions (Innis et al. (1990) PCR Protocols. A Guide to Methods and Applications, Academic Press) using Pfu DNA polymerase (Promega Corporation, Madison, USA). The PCR product is ligated with vector pCR-Blunt II-TOPO (Zero Blunt TOPO PCR Cloning Kit, Invitrogen, Groningen, The Netherlands) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and transformed into the E. coli strain TOP10.
- 10 Plasmid-carrying cells are selected on LB agar supplemented with 50 µg/ml of kanamycin. After isolation of the plasmid DNA, the vector is cleaved with the restriction enzymes BamHI and SalI and, after checking by separation in 0.8% agarose gel, is called pCRBluntpepB.
- 15 Vector pCRBluntpepB is then restricted with the restriction enzymes BamHI and SalI and, after separation in 0.8% agarose gel, the pepB fragment is isolated using the QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit (QIAGEN, Hilden, Germany). Vector pTrc99A (Pharmacia Biotech, Uppsala, Sweden) is
- 20 cleaved with the enzymes BamHI and SalI and then dephosphorylated with alkaline phosphatase in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions (Amersham Biosciences, Freiburg, Germany) and ligated with the isolated pepB fragment. The E. coli strain XL1-Blue MRF' (Stratagene, La
- 25 Jolla, USA) is transformed with the ligation mixture and plasmid-carrying cells are selected on LB agar supplemented with 50 µg/ml of ampicillin. The success of the cloning can be demonstrated, after isolation of the plasmid DNA, by control cleavage with the enzymes BamHI and SalI, EcoRV and
- 30 PvuI. The plasmid is called pTrc99ApepB (Figure 1).

Example 2

Preparation of L-threonine with the strain
MG442/pTrc99ApepB

The L-threonine-producing *E. coli* strain MG442 is described in patent US-A-4,278,765 and is deposited in the Russian National Collection for Industrial Microorganisms (VKPM, Moscow, Russia) as CMIM B-1628.

- 5 The strain MG442 is transformed with expression plasmid pTrc99ApepB, described in Example 1, and with vector pTrc99A and plasmid-carrying cells are selected on LB agar supplemented with 50 µg/ml of ampicillin. This procedure yields the strains MG442/pTrc99ApepB and MG442/pTrc99A.
- 10 Chosen individual colonies are then multiplied further on minimum medium of the following composition: 3.5 g/l of $\text{Na}_2\text{HPO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 1.5 g/l of KH_2PO_4 , 1 g/l of NH_4Cl , 0.1 g/l of $\text{MgSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 2 g/l of glucose, 20 g/l of agar, 50 mg/l of ampicillin. The formation of L-threonine is verified in
- 15 10 ml batch cultures contained in 100 ml conical flasks. This is done by inoculating 10 ml of preculture medium of the following composition: 2 g/l of yeast extract, 10 g/l of $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$, 1 g/l of KH_2PO_4 , 0.5 g/l of $\text{MgSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 15 g/l of CaCO_3 , 20 g/l of glucose, 50 mg/l of ampicillin, and
- 20 incubating for 16 hours at 37°C and 180 rpm on an ESR incubator from Kühner AG (Birsfelden, Switzerland). 250 µl of each of these precultures are transferred to 10 ml of production medium (25 g/l of $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$, 2 g/l of KH_2PO_4 , 1 g/l of $\text{MgSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 0.03 g/l of $\text{FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 0.018 g/l of
- 25 $\text{MnSO}_4 \cdot 1\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 30 g/l of CaCO_3 , 20 g/l of glucose, 50 mg/l of ampicillin) and incubated for 48 hours at 37°C. The formation of L-threonine by the original strain MG442 is verified in the same way except that no ampicillin is added to the medium. After incubation the optical density (OD)
- 30 of the culture suspension is determined using an LP2W photometer from Dr. Lange (Düsseldorf, Germany) at a measurement wavelength of 660 nm.

The concentration of L-threonine formed is then determined in the sterile-filtered culture supernatant using an amino

35 acid analyzer from Eppendorf-BioTronik (Hamburg, Germany)

by means of ion exchange chromatography and postcolumn reaction with ninhydrin detection.

Table 1 shows the result of the experiment.

Table 1

Strain	OD (660 nm)	L-threonine g/l
MG442	5.6	1.4
MG442/pTrc99A	3.8	1.3
MG442/pTrc99ApepB	4.9	2.2

Brief Description of the Figure:

Figure 1: Map of vector pTrc99ApepB

5 The indicated lengths are to be understood as approximate.
The abbreviations and symbols used are defined as follows:

- Amp: ampicillin resistance gene
- lacI: gene for the repressor protein of the trc promoter
- 10 • Ptrc: trc promoter region, IPTG-inducible
- pepB: coding region of the pepB gene
- 5S: 5S rRNA region
- rrnBT: rRNA terminator region

The abbreviations for the restriction enzymes are defined
15 as follows:

- BamHI: restriction endonuclease from *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens* H
- EcoRV: restriction endonuclease from *Escherichia coli* B946
- 20 • SalI: restriction endonuclease from *Streptomyces albus* G

- PvuI: restriction endonuclease from *Proteus vulgaris*

What is claimed is:

1. A process for the preparation of L-amino acids, especially L-threonine, wherein following steps are carried out:
 - 5 a) fermentation of microorganisms of the family Enterobacteriaceae which produce the desired L-amino acid and in which the pepB gene, or nucleotide sequences coding therefor, is (are) enhanced and, in particular, overexpressed,
 - 10 b) enrichment of the desired L-amino acid in the medium or in the cells of the microorganisms, and
 - c) isolation of the desired L-amino acid, where constituents of the fermentation broth, and/or all or part (≥ 0 to 100%) of the biomass, optionally
15 remain in the product.
2. The process according to claim 1, wherein microorganisms are used in which other genes of the biosynthetic pathway of the desired L-amino acid are additionally enhanced.
- 20 3. The process according to claim 1, wherein microorganisms are used in which the metabolic pathways which reduce the formation of the desired L-amino acid are at least partially switched off.
4. The process according to claim 1, wherein the
25 expression of the polynucleotide(s) coding for the pepB gene is increased.
5. The process according to claim 1, wherein the regulatory and/or catalytic properties of the polypeptide (protein) coded for by the polynucleotide
30 pepB are improved or enhanced.

6. The process according to claim 1, wherein microorganisms of the family Enterobacteriaceae in which additionally one or more genes selected from the group comprising:
- 5 6.1 the thrABC operon coding for aspartate kinase, homoserine dehydrogenase, homoserine kinase and threonine synthase,
- 6.2 the pyc gene coding for pyruvate carboxylase,
- 6.3 the pps gene coding for phosphoenolpyruvate
10 synthase,
- 6.4 the ppc gene coding for phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase,
- 6.5 the pntA and pntB genes coding for transhydrogenase,
- 15 6.6 the rhtB gene for homoserine resistance,
- 6.7 the mgo gene coding for malate:quinone oxidoreductase,
- 6.8 the rhtC gene for threonine resistance,
- 6.9 the thrE gene coding for threonine export
20 protein,
- 6.10 the gdhA gene coding for glutamate dehydrogenase,
- 6.11 the hns gene coding for DNA binding protein HLP-II,
- 6.12 the pgm gene coding for phosphoglucomutase,
- 25 6.13 the fba gene coding for fructose biphosphate aldolase,

- 6.14 the ptsH gene coding for phosphohistidine protein
hexose phosphotransferase,
- 6.15 the ptsI gene coding for enzyme I of the
phosphotransferase system,
- 5 6.16 the crr gene coding for the glucose-specific IIA
component,
- 6.17 the ptsG gene coding for the glucose-specific
IIBC component,
- 10 6.18 the lrp gene coding for the regulator of the
leucine regulon,
- 6.19 the csrA gene coding for the global regulator
Csr,
- 6.20 the fadR gene coding for the regulator of the fad
regulon,
- 15 6.21 the iclR gene coding for the regulator of the
central intermediary metabolism,
- 6.22 the mopB gene coding for the 10 kD chaperone,
- 6.23 the ahpC gene coding for the small subunit of
alkyl hydroperoxide reductase,
- 20 6.24 the ahpF gene coding for the large subunit of
alkyl hydroperoxide reductase,
- 6.25 the cysK gene coding for cysteine synthase A,
- 6.26 the cysB gene coding for the regulator of the cys
regulon,
- 25 6.27 the cysJ gene coding for the flavoprotein of
NADPH sulfite reductase,

- 6.28 the *cysI* gene coding for the hemoprotein of NADPH sulfite reductase,
- 6.29 the *cysH* gene coding for adenylyl sulfate reductase,
- 5 6.30 the *phoB* gene coding for the PhoB positive regulator of the *pho* regulon,
- 6.31 the *phoR* gene coding for the sensor protein of the *pho* regulon,
- 6.32 the *phoE* gene coding for protein E of the outer
10 cell membrane,
- 6.33 the *pykF* gene coding for fructose-stimulated pyruvate kinase I,
- 6.34 the *pfkB* gene coding for 6-phosphofructokinase II,
- 15 6.35 the *malE* gene coding for the periplasmatic binding protein of maltose transport,
- 6.36 the *rseA* gene coding for a membrane protein with anti-sigmaE activity,
- 6.37 the *rseC* gene coding for a global regulator of
20 the sigmaE factor,
- 6.38 the *sodA* gene coding for superoxide dismutase,
- 6.39 the *sucA* gene coding for the decarboxylase subunit of 2-ketoglutarate dehydrogenase,
- 6.40 the *sucB* gene coding for the dihydrolipoyl
25 transsuccinase E2 subunit of 2-ketoglutarate dehydrogenase,
- 6.41 the *sucC* gene coding for the β subunit of succinyl-CoA synthetase, and

6.42 the *sucD* gene coding for the α subunit of
succinyl-CoA synthetase

is (are) simultaneously enhanced and, in particular,
overexpressed, are fermented for the preparation of L-
amino acids.

5

7. The process according to claim 1, wherein
microorganisms of the family Enterobacteriaceae in
which additionally one or more genes selected from the
group comprising:

10

7.1 the *tdh* gene coding for threonine dehydrogenase,

7.2 the *mdh* gene coding for malate dehydrogenase,

7.3 the gene product of the open reading frame (orf)
yjfa,

15

7.4 the gene product of the open reading frame (orf)
ytfp,

7.5 the *pckA* gene coding for phosphoenolpyruvate
carboxykinase,

7.6 the *poxB* gene coding for pyruvate oxidase,

7.7 the *aceA* gene coding for isocitrate lyase,

20

7.8 the *dgsA* gene coding for the DgsA regulator of
the phosphotransferase system,

7.9 the *fruR* gene coding for the fructose repressor,

7.10 the *rpoS* gene coding for the sigma³⁸ factor,

7.11 the *aspA* gene coding for aspartate ammonium lyase
(aspartase), and

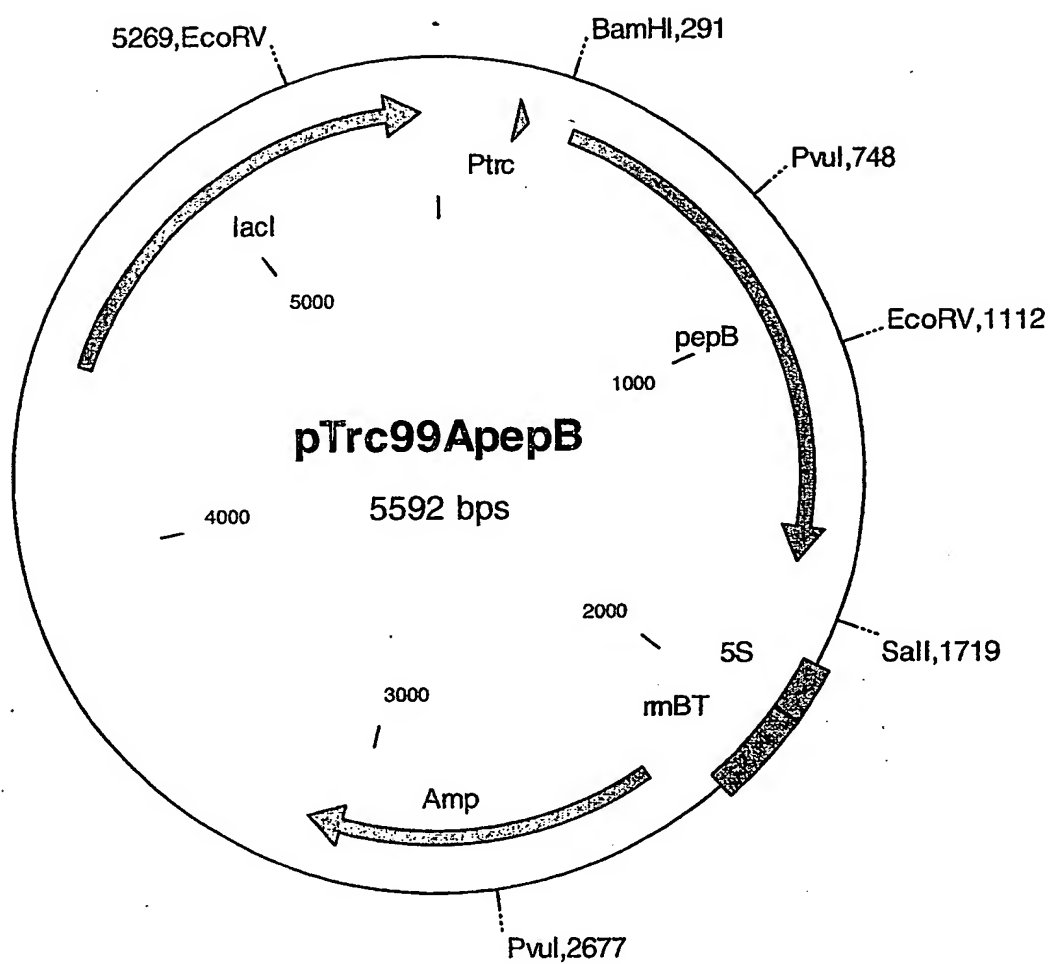
25

7.12 the *aceB* gene coding for malate synthase A

is (are) simultaneously attenuated and, in particular, switched off, or the expression is reduced, are fermented for the preparation of L-amino acids.

8. Microorganisms of the family Enterobacteriaceae, especially of the genus *Escherichia*, in which the pepB gene, or nucleotide sequences coding therefor, is (are) enhanced and, in particular, overexpressed.

Figure 1: Map of vector pTrc99ApepB



SEQUENCE LISTING

5 <110> Degussa AG

<120> Process for the preparation of L-amino acids using
strains of the family Enterobacteriaceae

10 <130> 020117 BT

<160> 2

<170> PatentIn version 3.1 .

15 <210> 1

<211> 24

<212> DNA

<213> Artificial sequence

20 <220>

<221> Primer

<222> (1)..(24)

<223> pepB5'

25 <400> 1

cgcggtatcca actggcggcc cttt 24

<210> 2

30 <211> 25

<212> DNA

<213> Artificial sequence

<220>

35 <221> Primer

<222> (1)..(25)

<223> pepB3'

<400> 2

40 acgcgtcgac ctgatgcgct acgct 25

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 C12P13/04 C12P13/08 C12N1/21 C12N15/11 C12N15/57

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 C12P C12N

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, MEDLINE, BIOSIS, CHEM ABS Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	SUZUKI ET AL.: "Aminopeptidases A, B, and N and Dipeptidase D are the foru cysteinylglycinases of Escherichia coli K-12" J. BACTERIOL., vol. 183, no. 4, - 1 February 2001 (2001-02-01) pages 1489-1490, XP002243880 cited in the application page 1490, column 1, line 1 - line 4; table 3 ----- -/--	1-8

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- *T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
- *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
- *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- *G* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

20 June 2003

Date of mailing of the international search report

10/07/2003

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Lopez García, F

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	<p>MATHEW ET AL.: "Salmonella enterica Seroovar Typhimurium peptidase B is a leucyl aminopeptidase with specificity with acidic amino acids"</p> <p>J. BACTERIOL., vol. 182, no. 12, - June 2000 (2000-06) pages 3383-3393, XP002243881 Abstract; p. 3386, col. 2, paragraph 2; p. 3387, col. 1, paragraph 3; Table 3-5.</p>	1-8
X	<p>SUZUKI H ET AL: "MAPPING, CLONING, AND DNA SEQUENCING OF PEPB WHICH ENCODES PEPTIDASE B OF ESCHERICHIA COLI K-12"</p> <p>JOURNAL OF FERMENTATION AND BIOENGINEERING, SOCIETY OF FERMENTATION TECHNOLOGY, JP, vol. 82, no. 4, 1996, pages 392-397, XP008016110 ISSN: 0922-338X cited in the application page 393, column 1, paragraph 2 -column 2, paragraph 1</p>	8
A	<p>US 4 278 765 A (DEBAOV VLADIMIR G ET AL) 14 July 1981 (1981-07-14) cited in the application column 3, line 30 - line 43; examples 1-3</p>	1-8
A	<p>CHASSAGNOLE C ET AL: "An integrated study of threonine-pathway enzyme kinetics in Escherichia coli"</p> <p>BIOCHEMICAL JOURNAL, THE BIOCHEMICAL SOCIETY, LONDON, GB, vol. 356, no. 2, 1 June 2001 (2001-06-01), pages 415-423, XP002232684 ISSN: 0264-6021 abstract; figure 1</p>	1-7
P,X	<p>WO 02 101063 A (DEGUSSA) 19 December 2002 (2002-12-19) page 1, line 4 - line 7</p>	1-8

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 4278765	A	14-07-1981	SU 875663 A1	15-09-1982
			HU 190999 B	28-12-1986
WO 02101063	A	19-12-2002	DE 10128780 A1	19-12-2002
			WO 02101068 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101062 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101063 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101064 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101054 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101065 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101066 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101055 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101050 A2	19-12-2002
			WO 02101067 A2	19-12-2002
			US 2003064485 A1	03-04-2003
			US 2003087404 A1	08-05-2003
			US 2003092138 A1	15-05-2003
			US 2003100081 A1	29-05-2003